

## August 7, 2006 Cambria City facility becoming model for regional emergency ops networks

For Immediate Release

August 7, 2006

### Cambria City facility becoming model for regional emergency ops networks

Johnstown, PA- From its state-of-the-art Cambria City home, the emergency operations center for the City of Johnstown and Cambria County is being developed as a hub that would coordinate with counterparts on the regional and state levels during an emergency, Congressman John Murtha said today during a tour of the facility.

As part of a Department of Defense demonstration project, the Integrated Emergency Operations Center will be linked to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency and PEMA's Region 13, which includes Pittsburgh and 13 surrounding counties. The demonstration is an effort to improve civilian/military emergency communications and response by testing the capability and willingness of state and local government agencies to synchronize assets and share information.

Murtha secured funding for the initiative through the U.S. Army Armament Research, Development and Engineering Center (ARDEC) in Picatinny, N.J. The IEOC program and a program known as the Regional Interoperable Communications Center (RICC), which also has a local tie, have been combined to form the larger ARDEC-directed Integrated Command Operations Program.

"I've been working to improve interoperability and coordination among emergency personnel since 9/11 when I saw first-hand how the lack of efficient, effective communications can hinder the response," Murtha said. "Here in one location, we've pulled together all the technological resources needed to protect the people of Southwestern Pennsylvania. I'm delighted that we've designed and built a center so advanced that it has become a model for regional networks around the country."

In its day-to-day roles for the city and county, the IEOC coordinates and communicates information such as data on weather and road conditions to emergency responders in the field and provides support for emergencies such as fires, hazardous materials accidents and gas leaks. In its wider role, the center also serves as a training and simulation center, as a research-and-development site for DoD and as a backup emergency operations center for any of the counties in Region 13.

The facility includes seating for all command, position chiefs and emergency support functions, more than 40 computers, a 20-foot-by-100-foot video wall capable of 24-hour operation, wireless connectivity, video teleconferencing capability and emergency communications dispatch to speed up and coordinate responses.

Six city workers are already housed at the IEOC, in the former Reliant Energy building on Broad Street. Five Cambria County staffers are expected to move into their new permanent quarters by the end of the month, and will join city employees for training or when the IEOC is activated for an emergency.

"Sept. 11 was a rude awakening for the United States and local municipalities," said Johnstown Mayor Don Zucco. "We found we did not have the ability to properly conduct interagency communications and were without the necessary information to move forward in emergency management."

Also involved in the project are two local companies - Johnstown-based MountainTop Technologies and Ebensburg's L. Robert Kimball and Associates. Seven employees of primary contractor MountainTop work out of the center, and Kimball is the contractor for the RICC, which will design and test interoperable communications between the 911 centers for Pittsburgh/Allegheny County and Cambria County, and the IEOC.

"We are very appreciative of Congressman Murtha's support for this project," said Dave Davis, MountainTop president. "We think the IEOC is a model that can be used across the country to improve communications and emergency response capabilities."

Using its new capabilities for the first time in March, the center managed voice communications, provided research data and transmitted critical information plotting building and manhole locations when a high level of unidentified flammable gas was detected downtown. In October, the IEOC, the Johnstown Fire Department, the Conemaugh Health System, and the Seventh Ward and West End Ambulance services will take part in "Urban Thunder," a full-scale regional exercise based primarily in Westmoreland County that will test various emergency plans and procedures.

The IEOC was designed according to the National Incident Management System template, part of a national effort to improve homeland security.

(Editor's note: The counties in Region 13 are Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Mercer, Somerset, Washington and Westmoreland. Also included are the City of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh FBI office.)